

Opportunities and  
Responsibilities  
of Citizenship

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# Opportunities and Responsibilities of Citizenship

This opportunity to be with you affords me several sources of gratification. It was a gratifying and pleasant thing to come because I was so strongly urged to do so by my distinguished friend, the patron saint of the Institute of Technology. It is gratifying always to have an opportunity to meet a group of men and women who have shown the seriousness of purpose and the intellectual ability creditably to complete a formal course of instruction, and who now stand ready to receive academic recognition for work done. To me it is especially gratifying to meet such a body of students, when I know that their work has been in the line of technical training, that there is going forth into the world of work such a body of graduates, such a group of students with minds effectively prepared for serious work and hands trained to make expression of theoretical knowledge, and whose aims we may know, by the very fact that they have chosen to pursue such a course of training and study, must be aims of usefulness and accomplishment.

Perhaps there is something of a personal note in the pleasure which I have in greeting young technical men, for I had my first experience in earning a livelihood as an apprentice at the machinist's trade, and later made such a start as our colleges were then able to offer on the road toward becoming an electrical engineer, and I have, therefore, though you may regard the ground for it slight, some feeling of fraternity and fellowship with technical men.

Gratification at the opportunity of seeing this great institution and of meeting this graduating class has

its serious note, however, in a feeling of deep responsibility that goes with the opportunity of speaking to you on this memorable day in your lives—for it is a memorable day, a day which will always stand out as marking the division between two periods; it is a moment when your minds are open, and when the right word, when a thought with the real ring of truth and sincerity in it, might, to some of you at least, be a guide or an inspiration of moment in your future. The opportunity to speak to you thus becomes to one seriously considering what it means, an occasion of real responsibility.

It was suggested to me that I tell you in the light of my experience what I believe will be factors that will be likely to contribute towards your success in your profession. I am glad to do that, and I will very briefly lay down what seems to me some important considerations likely to make toward material success, but if experience has taught me anything it has taught me that material success is but half the story, that if you are to accumulate what Dr. Eliot has so aptly termed “the durable satisfactions of life,” you must look outside the mere accomplishment of material success for most of them. And so I have taken for my subject what seems to me a broader and more important title.

Before proceeding to a consideration of that subject, however, it may be of some interest to you to have a word in regard to your outlook for material success in your professions, and for me to say something of those qualities which I believe will be helpful to you in aiding to attain such success.

I suppose a question that has come to all of you, and one which at the moment you may be thinking about, is a question that is outside of yourselves, outside of the quality and character of training which you have received here, and one which has to do with the general industrial and social order of the day; that is to say, I suppose you have all had raised in your minds the question of what are the opportuni-

ties offered to a youth in industrial and business life today? Are those opportunities the equal of those which your fathers encountered, or have difficulties been built up by the revolutionary development of our industrial life, by the aggregation of capital and the increase of its power through the formation of corporations, by the keener competition which characterizes our times, so that the chances of success are less than in former days, the struggle for its attainment greater, the prize harder to secure, the worth of the individual more difficult to demonstrate.

To all of those doubts I would emphatically answer, no. You are under no handicaps because of the time in which your career is placed.

I believe I can give you the most unqualified assurance of that. I see the situation from the point of view of membership in executive committees of important corporations, and if I know anything at all of business and industrial conditions, I believe that there has never been a more insistent call for well trained, energetic men of character, ability and initiative, nor that the world has ever been ready to pay greater rewards, or offer so many prizes for especial distinction, as is the case today. I speak from a considerable experience in the search of men of exceptional qualifications to fill places of great importance, and there is no fact clearer to me than the fact that our industrial and business life today is rich beyond anything that has gone before in opportunity for men with ability, industry, imagination and character.

And now just a word as to those qualities, characteristics, and habits of work which are most likely to lead the individual to the attainment of some part of these large material rewards which are waiting.

It would be trite for me to tell you that you have not finished your education, that you have only read the preface of the book of preparation, that your education is only started. These occasions are well called commencements. Do not for a moment think that

you can now lay down your books, that in the future you are to be relieved from the necessity for continuing to exercise the systematic habits of study of college days, that you are now to take up practical work and leave the school room behind you.

At some colleges the undergraduates have an entertaining ceremony on the completion of their course of mathematics of burning the calculus. Do not deceive yourselves by thinking that you can now make a pile of your school books and have a bonfire. If you wish success, you may make of them only a metaphorical bonfire that will furnish a light not to be danced around with feelings of relief and diversion, but rather to be used for further reading and study.

The measure in which you continue your systematic education, continue systematic reading—not technical reading alone, though you must do that to keep up with technical progress—but reading that will give you broad understanding, that will help you to consider present-day problems in the light of how men have solved similar problems in other days, reading that will give you culture, insight, quickened human sympathies—the measure of such reading that you do will largely be the measure of the quality of mind that you will bring to the tasks of life.

There is a theory entertained by many that we have reached a time when work should be less urgent than in other days, when men should have more leisure, that their hours of labor should be shorter, and periods of recreation longer. If you hope to gain one of the prizes of life, do not adopt that theory for your individual guidance and practice. It may be true for the man whose day's work is solely made up of an expenditure of physical effort; there never was a time when it was less true of the man who hopes to make an intellectual success of life.

I have often said to young men who have asked advice about their work, that if they hoped for a large measure of success they must make up their minds to



do two full days' work each day. They must do one full day's work at their regular appointed task—at their job; to that day's work they must bring energy, a quick intelligence to comprehend not only the details of what they are doing, but the relation of what they are doing to the larger movement to which their work belongs, and a desire not alone to accomplish the stint of work that will justify their day's pay, but they must voluntarily and vigorously assume every other duty to which they can lay their hand in addition to that stint, so that they may learn not alone the technique of their own task, but the technique of the work that others are doing. When they have done all that, however, they have done but one day's work, and they have done but half of what should be the real measure of a day's accomplishment, for the man who is determined to make a distinguished success.

I tell you, if you are to secure one of the large prizes of success, you must make up your mind to adopt the theory of the double days' work, and when the regular day's work is finished, you must be prepared systematically to devote some considerable portion of time to study, toward gaining a broad and intelligent view in its large aspects of the work with which you are engaged, toward making additions to your stock of general knowledge, to the understanding of problems of the day, to your duties as a part of the social organization.

You will not do that by a quick scanning of newspaper headlines, nor a detailed study of the baseball scores; you will not do it by any desultory and unplanned system of reading. You will only accomplish it in full measure if you have learned here in college, or have natively implanted in you, habits of systematic mental application; the intelligence to lay out definite courses of study and the strength of purpose to adhere to them.

Now, just one more thought in regard to those qualities which make for material success. To forget yourself is more important than to remember any

single thing you have ever learned in your lifetime. Do not worry about your personal relation to a piece of work, but give the deepest attention and consideration to the execution of that piece of work. Never mind whether you have what you regard as your full share in it; never mind whether you are getting what you feel to be your full measure of credit; have the single purpose of getting the work done, of seeing that every proper means is employed to do the work better than it has been done before, and forget yourself, the credit you will receive, the relation you personally occupy toward the work, and if you will do that, I give you my word you will have accomplished for yourself the greatest possible good. You will not be unwatched. Men will have an eye to your capacities and characteristics, their observation will be far sharper than you guess, and when that over-seeing eye finds the man who is interested in the job more than in himself, that man will be marked for promotion and for larger things.

But I am using up my time without getting to my subject. Before going to it, however, there is still one word that I must say. If you think it is trite because it has been said many times, do not forget that it embodies the greatest truth that can be said about material success, although it is a truth that is frequently obscured and lost sight of. Integrity, honesty of purpose, good character, are the foundations upon which success must depend. You may hear stories of gains that have been made by unfair means, by sharp practice, by shrewdness that only just keeps within the law; but those gains are not success, and in so far as you will establish a reputation for honor, in so far as you put sound character into your work and never try to reach a goal by a short cut that means some loss of your own self-respect, you will lay a substantial foundation for real success. This is not a mere preachment to a graduating class, it is one of the most practical suggestions that I could give you out of the years of experience that I have

had. For just mere practical shrewdness in the way of advice by which to reach position and secure reward, there is no observation that I could make that would be of more use to you than one that I once heard, to the effect that God had somehow so fixed the world that a man can afford to do about right.

You are going forth to lives of technical work where you hope to make use of technical training and scientific knowledge. That field of labor, however, by no means encompasses your relations. You are going forth as members of a highly organized society, at a time when the recognition of mutual dependence and responsibility in all society has been tremendously quickened, at a time when individualism is rapidly giving way to a larger recognition of both the strength and the responsibilities of mutual social relations. You are, therefore, beginning active life in a period when the responsibilities and the opportunities of citizenship are of the greatest importance.

We are in a time when there is going on much readjustment in regard to our views concerning business ethics, concerning natural laws affecting the distribution of wealth and the varying proportion that different classes are entitled to in that distribution. It is a time when there is great criticism of the established order; when there are many new theories of how the powers of government should be exercised. These days are fruitful in the birth of hopeful plans for giving equality of opportunity, easier conditions of life, a wider distribution of prosperity by the magic of legislation. I would not be surprised if there had been more statutes enacted in the United States during your lifetime than had ever been enacted in all the world before, since the beginning of history. I know there are 57,000 statutes on the tablets of New York State alone, but we are dragging far in the rear of some other States in the exuberance of new legislation.

Now, I tell you there is no new political economy. There is no novel arrangement of society which will

permit you to succeed otherwise than by the exercise of those same qualities that have brought success in other generations. But you are entering active life at a time when sound judgment and serious purpose must be brought to the testing of an endless number of legislative schemes, to the making of political decisions that will be of the greatest moment. It is undoubtedly possible to legislate in a way that will be helpful in effecting a more just division of the results of labor, legislation that will make a more equitable distribution of prosperity, but it has been well said that the method of dividing prosperity is of little importance if there is no prosperity to divide. In order that we may all have prosperity it will be one of your most solemn duties, and a duty the wise exercise of which will have much to do with the opportunities for success in life for you to make wise political decisions.

Educated men in accepting the same rights of citizenship that uneducated men accept assume a far greater weight of responsibility. It is the duty of the educated man to study with intelligence the political questions of the day, to form opinions of his own, rather than to accept the dictum of others, to be an intelligent guide to those whose minds have been less well prepared to form intellectual judgments.

You are a picked body of men. Out of every four hundred children who receive the ordinary training in a public school, only one proceeds to college and finishes his college course. You now stand enrolled in that selected class, and you have assumed responsibilities with the education which has been given to you which should quicken your interest in public affairs and should guide you toward positions of leadership.

With us a majority controls actions, and the view of the majority tends to usurp the control of public opinion. Do not fall into the easy habit of taking your opinion from majorities. You have been given the equipment and you now have the duty imposed upon you of thinking for yourselves.

George William Curtis, in an address on the leadership of educated men, described this duty of leadership in a way that is worth your reading. Doubtless leaders express a sentiment which is shared by the men and women around them, he said, but it is the leaders who form and foster the sentiment. They are not the puppets of the crowd, light weather-cocks which merely show the shifting gusts of popular feeling. Educated men do not follow because they cannot resist nor make of their voices the tardy echo of a thought they do not share. They should not be dainty and feeble hermits because they are educated men. They are equal citizens with the rest. They should be men of strong convictions and persuasive speech to show their brethren what they ought to think and do.

That is the secret of leadership. It is not subservience to the mob. It is not giving vehement voice to popular frenzy that makes a leader. To do that makes a demagogue. Leadership is the power of kindling a feeling of sympathy and trust which will inspire eager followers. It was not a mob, an ignorant multitude swayed by a mysterious impulse, it was a body of educated men, wise and heroic, because they were educated, who lifted this country to independence and laid deep and strong the foundations of the Republic.

You have studied the sciences. You know something of the immutable natural laws of physics and chemistry. Such training should have given you a respect for law, a respect for law which should be carried into your consideration of social relations. You should have learned that you are in the midst of an ordered world, and if your minds have grasped the beauty of natural laws, you will have gained an increasing respect for order and a readiness to become a part of it.

Speaking with this thought in mind, President Hadley has said that a man must comprehend that he is something more than a mere producer. "He is

a member of the body politic, living in constant and complex relations with his fellow-man. The right adjustment of these relations between man and man is a more difficult and important thing than the development of technical skill. National education, if it is to be really national and not individual, must prepare the way for this adjustment. It must teach people not only to make the most of themselves, but to do the most for others. They must learn how to communicate their ideas so that others will understand them, to arrange their labor so that others can enjoy its fruits, and to take part in the work of government so that the community as a whole shall be directed by political intelligence instead of political ignorance."

The educated man should be neither a conservative nor a radical; or, in the political phrase of our day, neither a progressive nor a stand-patter. He should know too much to do that. You should recognize the value and worth of much in the existing order, but you should be able wisely to see that life is growth and growth is change; and while you should welcome and aid change, you should be far too wise to believe, as some radicals seem to, that whatever is wrong; that whatever is novel and untried must hold in it promise of good. You should learn to cultivate a just moderation; to reconcile change with order, progress with stability. That is progressive conservatism; that is conservative progressiveness.

Years ago Charles Sumner said, "Rightly understanding these terms, who would not be a conservative; who would not be a reformer?—a conservative of all that is good, a reformer of all that is evil,—a conservative of knowledge, a reformer of ignorance,—a conservative of truths and principles whose seat is the bosom of God, a reformer of laws and institutions which are but the imperfect work of man."

If I have been able to make myself clear to you, you will have seen that I believe that in one word is encompassed the law of material success, the scope of your duty to society, the measure of your responsibility to

citizenship. That one word is service. Make up your mind to serve. It is service that receives reward; it is by service, forgetful of self-interest, service for the sake of accomplishment, that you will gain the greatest material rewards. It is by service to society, by recognition of rights more sacred than any that are personal to yourself that you will gain an attitude toward life rich in permanent satisfactions. It is by intelligent service, free from self-interest, in the political activity of your time, that you will justify the great gift of citizenship which has been bestowed upon you.



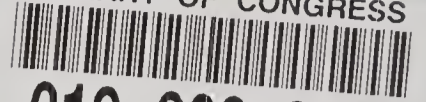








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